

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

RESOURCES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Minutes

WEDNESDAY, 2 OCTOBER 2019

PRESENT: Councillor A Hart (Chair)

Councillors C J S Atkins, J Davies, E Fallows, M Gledhill,
N Hawkins, T Holmes, B A Hughes, K J Jackson, J T Jones,
L A Malyon, I Plant, T Riley, P Wilkinson and N Yates

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor T Hall and G Bentley

APOLOGIES: Councillors A Hulme, L D Lea, P Routledge and D Shaw

9 **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS, IF ANY**

There were none.

10 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

At this point of the meeting, Councillor Yates enquired if an update had been received from the Internal Parking Board, in relation to the management of the car parks in Biddulph. The Chair and Andrew Stokes advised, that the Council hadn't received an update as yet, it would be followed up and Councillor Yates would be contacted accordingly.

DECIDED: That the minutes from the meeting held on the 24th July 2019 be approved.

11 **URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS, IF ANY (24 HOURS NOTICE TO BE PROVIDED TO THE CHAIRMAN)**

There were no urgent items of business.

12 **DECLARATION OF INTERESTS:**

No declarations of interest were made.

13 **QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDERS, IF ANY**

Question from Councillor Yates:

Q1. Whilst we are encouraged to see that action is being taken to bring empty properties that appear on the Council Tax list back into timely use, what actions are being taken to address the empty and derelict properties that are missing from the Council Tax list - the properties that are hidden in plain site, and blight our communities?

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Response - Councillor Bowen , Portfolio Holder for Communities

"I know that Cllr Yates will be aware of the Council's Empty Property Strategy and I understand that he has met with Officers to discuss empty properties within his ward. I would encourage all Members to raise with Officers any similar properties that are causing concern within their ward.

The Council takes a robust approach to addressing empty properties in the District and, more recently, has engaged with an external company to undertake a review of empty properties over 6 months, which involves an initial canvass followed by an inspection if required. Following completion of this review, the Council intends to issue a questionnaire to the owners of those properties that remain empty to understand the reasons why the properties are empty and look to support them where possible in bringing those properties back into use.

In reference to properties you refer to as 'not on the list', I assume this relates to properties that have been awarded an exemption. For example, where a prohibition order has been served which restricts people residing in the property on health and safety grounds. These properties would not appear on the empty property report, but would appear on the exemption report, which we could also circulate to Councillors to review for their ward. We only remove properties from the Council Tax list when we are notified by the Valuation Office to do so – for example where a property has been demolished or changed use to a Business premises and so is added to the Business Rates listing.

Finally, I am aware that there is commitment in the Committee work programme to provide an Empty Property Update at a future meeting to ensure further discussion on this important issue for the Council."

Councillor Yates emphasised the importance of proactivity and for empty properties not to be forgotten. He felt that officers should engage with local councillors to gather evidence on this matter. In response, the Chair advised that it was a good idea for all members to inform officers of any empty properties and to provide any local knowledge. Discussion took place around the difficulties which surrounded refurbishment of empty properties and the options which were available for re-development.

It was confirmed that there was an item on the Work Programme for a review of empty properties.

14 **FIRST QUARTER 2019/20 FINANCIAL, PROCUREMENT & PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

Claire Hazeldene – Deputy Director and Head of Finance, presented a report which informed members of the Council's overall performance and financial position for the period ended 30th June 2019 ("First Quarter 2019/20").

The position was summarised as follows:

Subject	Headline	Reference
Finance	The headlines for the first quarter were: <i>Performance against Budget</i>	Appendix A

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the Quarter One stage the General Fund projected outturn for 2019/20 was an overspend of £52,590. <p><i>Efficiency Programme</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2019/20 general fund efficiency target of £842,000 had almost been achieved with £830,690 of savings achieved to date. <p><i>Capital Programme</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised Capital Programme budget for 2019/20 is £5.8 million including the carry forward of capital underspends from 2018/19. The projected outturn for the year is £5.8 million at this early stage. <p><i>Treasury Management</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash investments held at 30th June 2019 totalled £9.1 million. The Ascent loan and debenture currently stood at £19 million. • Council borrowing at 30th June 2019 totalled £11 million • The Council's net interest receipts were projected to be £18,010 above budget. <p><i>Revenue Collection</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28.62% of Council Tax was collected by 30th June 2019 compared to 28.99% for the same period last year. • 29.38% of Business Rates was collected by 30th June 2019 compared with 29.63% for the same period last year. • At the end of Quarter One debt that was over 60 days old was £72,400 which compared with £82,560 at 30th June 2018 	
Procurement	<p>The headlines for the first quarter were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 procurement activities were completed • The Procurement forward plan includes 70 procurement activities for completion in 2019/20 (either SMDC only or joint) • At the 30th June 2019, 50% of procurement activity undertaken was on the forward plan and the Council paid 94% of its invoices within 30 days during the year 	Appendix B
Performance	<p>The headlines for the first quarter were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 71% of the key performance indicators met target • Of the 18 Priority Actions within the Corporate Plan, two were still to commence, four were rated amber, one rated red the remainder being classified as 'Green' • The Council received 20 complaints, 47 comments and 13 compliments in the First Quarter. Repeat complaints and response times both on track 	Appendix C

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Officers were asked about Brough Park and if the improvements were dependent on the Heritage Lottery Fund. Issues were also highlighted such as, a build up of moss, debris and illegally parked vehicles which put users in danger. In response, the Panel was advised that a business case was currently being developed for the Park which included a re-submission of a bid for grant funding but improvements would go ahead should the bid be unsuccessful. Members would be kept up to date with the outcome of the application for Heritage Lottery Funding.

Discussion also took place around the upgrade to CCTV equipment which was currently being procured, improvements to Brough Park Leisure Centre and the performance framework. The Panel was informed that Parkwood Leisure would be in attendance at the next meeting of the Service Delivery Overview and Scrutiny Panel, at which members would have the opportunity raise any issues and scrutinise the performance of the organisation.

A member of the Panel felt that there was disparity in the amount of money allocated to the markets in the three main towns, that the Council should approach the owner of the market in Cheadle with a view to purchase and that there wasn't a detailed strategy for the town. He was also concerned about the recent landslide in Cheadle which had affected a number of shops and if there would be any support from the Council. It was explained to the Panel that there was a masterplan for Cheadle and the Council had previously tried to purchase the market. The Council had a responsibility in relation to the welfare of the residents affected by the landslide, and dependant on their circumstances the Council could assist with support for the businesses. The Council's Executive Director (Place) would be contacted after the meeting and the Councillors from Cheadle would be kept informed in relation to this matter.

The Panel also debated responsibility for the mitigation of flooding, the various organisation involved and the Council's response should flooding occur.

DECIDED: That the Panel **NOTE:-**

- The First Quarter 2019/20 financial, procurement and performance position detailed in Appendices A, B and C and summarised at 3.3 of the: and
- The proposed write offs set out in Appendix D of the report.

15 **CORPORATE PLAN 2019 - 2023**

The Panel gave its consideration to a report in relation to the new Corporate Plan. It was essential for the Council to develop and agree a Corporate Plan. The plan would provide clear direction for the delivery of services to achieve the Council's vision, aims and objectives to deliver positive outcomes for citizens

The purpose of a Corporate Plan was to establish the Council's vision, corporate objectives and established key priorities for the medium term i.e. in the case of the district council covering a period of up to four years (the life of a political administration). It in effect established the Council's commitments in the delivery of services and community leadership to the citizens of the Staffordshire Moorlands.

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A summary of the proposed Corporate Plan was attached at Appendix A of the report.

The plan set out the Council's vision, aims and objectives for the next for four years. It also identified the outcomes which would be given the highest priority and the areas in which the Council would be seeking to influence partners to improve the quality of life for residents.

The achievement of the Council's objectives would be supported by a number of priority actions to ensure step improvements and maximum impact upon the priority outcomes. The key actions committed in the Corporate Plan were detailed in Appendix B of the report.

The new Corporate Plan would build on the existing plans and priorities and importantly would be steered by the political administration with the mandate provided in the recent local elections. However the Corporate Plan was a document that needed to be owned by the whole Council. As a consequence the Council held a members' priority setting event the outcomes from which (detail attached at Appendix C) had been taken into account in the development of the new plan.

Once the core of the Corporate Plan had been adopted, members would then be in a position to determine a set of local performance indicators and targets. It was suggested that this was undertaken by the Resources Overview & Scrutiny Panel at its November meeting.

The objective - 'Effective recycling and waste management' was referred to as a member felt that the Council needed to offer a recycling service to businesses. She was also concerned about Leek town centre being unattractive to tourists due to the poor state of repair of the Bus Station public toilets and requested an update on this matter. Andrew Stokes – Executive Director (Transformation), informed members that a delegated decision report would be published shortly, which would award the contract for the refurbishment of the public conveniences.

In relation to commercial recycling, the Council only had a limited number of commercial waste contracts as many businesses used national companies to collect their waste. Previously, it had been uneconomical for the Council to offer a complete recycling collection service for businesses. However, as part of the new National Waste Strategy there were proposals for it to become statutory for Councils to provide a commercial recycling service.

Members' comments on the proposed aims and objectives within the Corporate Plan included the following:-

- That the objective – 'Meeting the challenge of climate change' should be an aim rather than an objective.
- As the Council had declared a Climate Emergency, the proposed aim 'Protect and improve the environment' should include more detail. As a Climate Change Sub-Committee had been set up, it suggested that the Sub-Committee provide a suggested wording for this aim which would be considered.

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- (Aim3) - Clarification on the measures which could be taken to improve bus services was requested. The Leader had undertaken work on bus services and would provide further details in due course.
- If the establishment of a new procurement strategy would include coaching sessions for smaller businesses and if there was scope for an additional post within the Procurement Team, to provide contract management assistance. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the new procurement strategy would be brought to this Panel for scrutiny and that the small dedicated team currently provided assistance to smaller business that wished to tender for Council contracts.

The Chair informed the Panel that compliments had been received from users of the Medical Centre on Wharf Road, Biddulph on the re-surfacing works on the car park, which had been carried out by a local company.

Discussion took place around the Preston Model, increased recycling by businesses at household waste recycling centres and bottle deposit schemes.

Members were also advised that an annual report was produced each year which gave councillors the opportunity to check the Corporate Plan and where necessary, make small changes.

DECIDED:

- 1) The Panel considered and commented on the summary of the Corporate Plan as detailed at Appendices A and B of the report.
- 2) That, subject to any changes agreed, the Panel requested that **CABINET**:
 - **RECOMMEND** that Council approved the Council's vision, aims, objectives, influencing objectives and priorities;
 - **APPROVE** a process of internal and external consultation as set out in the report; and
 - **AGREE** that the Panel considered and developed a new performance framework at its next meeting.

16 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019 & MHCLG GUIDANCE

Linden Vernon - Senior Officer (Governance and Member Support) introduced a report which provided councillors with a summary of the work undertaken by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels during 2018 – 2019 and guidance issued on the Overview and Scrutiny function in Local and Combined Authorities.

During 2018/19, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels continued to scrutinise performance internally/externally, hold the Cabinet to account and contribute to policy development. The range of work and issues considered by each Panel during 2018/19 were summarised in sections 6 - 9 of the report. Appendix A of the report contained the terms of reference of each Panel and its membership.

Section 10 of the report also summarised for members the statutory guidance issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) on scrutiny in Local Government and Combined Authorities.

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A member queried the accuracy of the membership for the Scrutiny Panels, this would be reviewed after the meeting and any necessary changes would be made. Councillor Atkins offered to provide feedback following a Centre of Public Scrutiny seminar she had planned to attend in the near future.

Members and the Chair thanked the Democratic Services Team for the excellent level of service they provided to Councillors.

DECIDED:- That the report be **NOTED**.

17 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel considered its Work Programme and agreed the items listed.

DECIDED: That the Work Programme for 2019-20 be agreed.

18 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

DECIDED:-

That pursuant to Section 100A (2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that exempt information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 100I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the paragraphs indicated

19 **FIRST QUARTER FINANCE, PROCUREMENT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2019/20 - APPENDIX D**

The Panel received a schedule of applications for write-off of Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry Debts.

The meeting closed at 11.45 am

_____ Chairman _____ Date